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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN RESPONSE TO UK REQUEST FOR AFGHAN
COUNTERNARCOTICS ASSISTANCE

REF: STATE 039676

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1. (SBU) After coordinating with our British colleagues, EconPolCouns presented reftel points on March 23 to Johannes Froehlich, Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Justice and Home Affairs Division, and Wolfgang Spadinger, Head of the Foreign Ministry's Office for International Cooperation in Drug Control, Crime Prevention, and Counterterrorism. Froehlich confirmed the Austrian government received the February 28 letter from British Foreign Secretary Straw and Secretary of State for International Development Benn.

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Froehlich said the matter is currently pending action by the Foreign Ministry's Asian bureau. Froehlich and Spadinger were noncommittal on additional Austrian support to the Afghanistan Counter Narcotics Trust Fund. Instead, they cited Austria's 2002 contribution of six million Euros in assistance to Afghanistan for demining, the advancement of women, and counternarcotics efforts.

2. (SBU) Froehlich and Spadinger echoed U.S. and UK concerns about the substantial increase in Afghan narcotics cultivation. They agreed that the international community must support reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan to ensure the country's future. Spadinger noted that Austrian participation in a project to establish an Afghan counternarcotics police force is entering its third year. He added that Austria is contributing to efforts to strengthen Afghanistan's judiciary system.

3. (SBU) Froehlich and Spadinger stressed that Austria continues to focus on counternarcotics efforts in Central Asia. In particular, Austria plays a leading role in the European Union's Border Management Program for Central Asia (BOMCA) and in the Paris Pact and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). According to Spadinger, Austria relies on its cooperation with the UNODC to engage Kabul on counternarcotics efforts.

4. (SBU) UK Embassy officer William Gatward told us that the UK Ambassador had raised the issue with the Austrian Foreign Minister's chef du cabinet, Michael Zimmermann, on March 18. Zimmermann had said that Austria would take a closer look at the Trust Fund once the Afghan Government provided more details. Gatward added that the Austrians had indicated that they are scaling back their development programs outside of Southeast Europe and Austria's twenty priority countries (which does not include Afghanistan).

Brown